
Cholecystectomy (gallbladder removal)



One of the most useful and efficient ways to convey information to you about your pet is via the written word. We carefully craft these notes to give you helpful information and accurate expectations around your pet's surgical experience.

Please read this. *Please save it and read it during each stage of the recovery process.* Surprises make for a stressful time for everyone.

Your pet has had surgery performed in the abdomen to remove the gallbladder. While the gallbladder is an important organ, the vast majority of animals can live normal lives without it. If your pet's gallbladder was removed because it had a tumor in it, the prognosis for health will depend on the type of tumor that was diagnosed through biopsy of the gallbladder tumor.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Please keep a note of your questions as you and your pet progress thru recovery and address them to your primary care veterinary team. Our surgery group will contact your primary care team on **Day 2** (after their phone follow-up with you) and **Day 14** (after your recheck visit with them) to check in on your pet's progress and see if you have had any concerns or questions. This method will maintain continuity in care and an accurate patient medical record.

First few days postop

MONITORING

Please keep your pet in a comfortable, safe, indoor location without free access to stairs for the next 24 hours as he/she recovers from anesthesia and surgery.

Your pet may be groggy for the next few days. He or she may whine or appear more anxious than usual; this may indicate pain/discomfort or side-effects of the medications. Please call your primary care veterinary team for assistance with medication adjustments or return for exam and additional pain medications as needed.

Monitor appetite and attitude. *If both do not steadily improve over the next 1-2 days,* please call your primary care veterinary team or return for progress evaluation and problem-solving. Feeling sick and loss of appetite is common, but it can be unsafe for patients to go for more than 1-2 days without eating; many patients have not eaten for several days before surgery as well. If your pet is not eating and drinking near normal amounts and/or not able to take their medications within 1-2 days, please contact your primary care veterinary team for planning.

You can expect your pet to have a bowel movement within 5 days. Some animals take longer than others depending on when they last ate prior to surgery and when they started

eating after surgery. It may be abnormal in color and consistency for 2-3 days. If you have any concerns, please speak with your primary care veterinary team.

Please confirm that your pet has urinated within 24 hours of returning home. If he/she does not, or you notice any problems related to urination, please speak with your primary care veterinary team.

Closely supervise your pet's movements over the first 3-4 days when s/he will be groggy from anesthetics and pain medications. Do not allow access to dangerous situations/locations (i.e. stairs, furniture, small children, other pets). Limit activities to necessary events only (on leash/out to go to the bathroom; access to food/water.)

Please look at the incision when you get home; knowing what "normal" looks like is helpful later when trying to understand if the incision is healing abnormally. Photos are helpful for you and us, when communicating from a distance.

MEDICATIONS

It is likely that you have been prescribed one or more medications (given by mouth) for your pet over the first 2-3wks of recovery. During the discharge appointment or shortly thereafter, please make sure you understand:

- what each medication is being used to treat,
- what side-effects may develop, and
- whether or not the medication should be refilled and continued.

BANDAGE CARE (IF PRESENT)

A clear, plastic bandaid may have been applied to the incision (Tegaderm). This will protect the incision from infection from the environment and a wayward pet tongue! It is useful for 2-3 days. You may remove it like a "bandaid" at any time.

Week 1-2 postop

MONITORING

Please look at the incision twice daily. It should be dry, slightly red along the margins, slightly swollen/thick on the edges with a light crust down the center. Over several days, it should lose redness and swelling.

Problems to call your veterinarian about:

- gapping (the edges should be exactly touching)
- ongoing or new discharge (other than small amount of crusting)
- swelling (other than slightly raised skin near edges).

Some bruising is normal and will resolve in 5-7 days.

The occasional patient will have more extensive bruising on day 2-3. If this develops, please let your primary care veterinarian know; a visit or sending photos will help them characterize the issue and decide on a course of action. The vast majority of the time, this is a transient issue that will follow a typical 5-7 day course resolving.

Do not allow your pet to lick or chew the incision. Pets tend to want to lick early in the healing period and scratch later in the healing period; this can compromise the incision and predispose to infection. If necessary, please prevent access to the incision by using creative clothing options (ex. human T-shirt, animal "bodysuit"), an E-collar or other devices, if you must leave your pet unattended. See www.directvetsurg.com, Pet Owner portal→Pet Links and DVS Resources

TEST PENDING

If there were any samples removed for testing, they will be submitted, and results usually will be available in 5-7 days. Your primary care team will contact you with test results and make any treatment changes as needed.

PROGRESS EXAMS

If your pet was quite ill before surgery, s/he may need more intensive support postoperatively, either as an inpatient at a 24hr facility or as an outpatient with your primary care veterinary team. Plan to remain in close contact with your team to keep them updated on your pet's status—comfort, eating, drinking, mobility. It may be beneficial for the team to monitor daily or every several days with a physical exam or other diagnostic testing; or to provide supportive care with injectable hydration and medications.

If all is going well, please return to your primary care clinic in 10-14 days for a routine progress exam. Skin healing will be evaluated, sutures (if present) will be removed, and any questions you have will be addressed. (Alternatively, you can schedule a remote progress exam to include a photo of the incision. Include a brief summary for the veterinary team and any questions you have.)

We are often removing a gallbladder that has been obstructed or ruptured making an animal sick and at risk for infection or other organ problems. It may be advisable to have your pet's blood tested at this first post-operative progress exam to update recovery status; please discuss this with your primary care veterinary team.

DIET

There are no restrictions or additions recommended for your pet's diet. Encourage eating and maintain them on a high-quality diet during their postoperative recovery and until abnormalities have resolved.

It is common for patients who are sick from gallbladder problems to not want to eat before and after surgery. This can become a problem quickly because good nutrition and hydration are necessary for effective healing and recovery. Some patients will benefit from "bypass feeding" that involves placing a small tube from the outside into the esophagus

(through the nostril or a small incision in the side of the neck) and giving liquified food several times daily. This gives them nutrition even when they are feeling sick and unable to eat. It also allows us to give some medications so those do not have to be given by mouth. Keep your primary care veterinary team updated on how much your pet has eaten and drank daily; for a full and rapid recovery, your pet has to eat as much or more than they normally did, so keep track of the volume of food most importantly.

RESTRICTIONS

Restrict your pet from any rigorous activity for 2 weeks. No running, jumping, playing. For dogs, short, leashed walks around the yard to urinate/defecate are fine. Walking around one level of the house is fine. Prevent all pets from jumping up and down from furniture, etc. A bad landing or an awkward take-off can result in serious repercussions.

Confine your pet, when unattended, to one level/section of the house on carpeted floors or crate confine. Rugs can be used to reduce the risk of slipping on slippery surfaces.

Limited, supervised access to stairs is recommended for 2 weeks. Restrict access to stairs when your pet is unattended (baby gates, etc.) Use caution and direct supervision on stairs (up and down) with a hand on the collar and a safety strap/leash under the belly to prevent falls.

Please **always** use a short (6 ft) leash when taking your pet outside to urinate/defecate during this restriction period. Use a belly band/sling/strap for safety when walking across slippery floors & icy sidewalks to prevent falling

Long-term lifestyle

There are no restrictions to lifestyle after gallbladder removal. It is a good idea to inform any attending veterinary professional that your pet has had his/her gallbladder removed if your pet becomes ill for any reason in the future. Save any diagnostic results or information related to a diseased gallbladder with your pet's medical files for later reference.

Depending on the type of disease that was treated with gallbladder removal, routine follow-up blood tests to monitor organ status may be recommended.

Checklist:

HOME MONITORING AND PROGRESS CHECK-IN WITH VETERINARY TEAM

- Pet attitude and appetite—Are these improving daily? What are your observations? What are your specific concerns?
- Pet mobility—Is this improving daily? What are your observations? What are your specific concerns?

- ❑ Incision health—Is redness and swelling going away? Is there discharge or moisture? (Photos taken close-up and at different angles are helpful for your primary care veterinary team,)
- ❑ Pet pain level—What are your observations? What are your specific concerns?
- ❑ Other

Based on your own experience through this, we welcome and encourage suggestions to this information that may help future patients and their people. Pay it forward! (directvetsurg@gmail.com)

--The DVS Crew